

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

NAME:

**JANET TEMPE MEREWETHER**

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SUBJECT:

**INNOVATION IN STYLE AND PERFORMANCE**

**IN HYBRID DOCUMENTARY**

***JABE BABE – A HEIGHTENED LIFE***

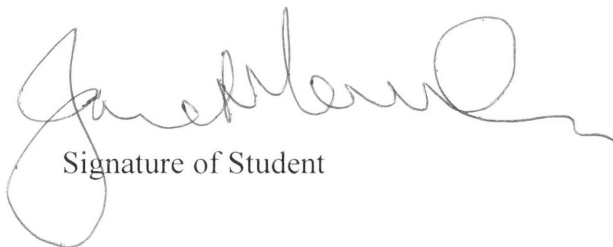
(52 minute hybrid documentary film)

## **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. M. ...', written over the text 'Signature of Student'.

Signature of Student

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a definition of the ‘hybrid’ documentary, which is the contemporary term used to describe non-fiction films which employ a stylised form of representation of the subjective voice, and may incorporate experimental and self-reflexive modes of production. This exegesis argues that hybrid documentaries integrate fictional characteristics through the use of formal innovation in performance, design and *mise-en-scène*. Hybrid documentary frequently presents voices from the margins of society, and has been particularly embraced by feminist, queer and avant-garde filmmakers seeking to invert the position of the subject as victim and establish new aesthetic possibilities for the documentary. The hybrid form is characterised by highly original directorial approaches, which may incorporate documentary, structuralist, media art and performance art practice.

Hybrid documentary is frequently self-reflexive and eclectic, foregrounding its mode of construction, and revelling in the ironic celebration of quotation, artifice and fantasy. It is reflective of the definition of hybridity in post-colonial studies and the biological sciences in that it seeks to artificially fuse disparate and incongruous cultures and sources into a unified whole. Hybridity questions the existence of ‘objectivity’ and fixed definitions of history, culture and identity, instead representing the ‘in-between’ spaces. In this way it can be differentiated from the definition of conventional documentary as a conveyor of ‘truth,’ or, as Nichols proposes, a ‘discourse of sobriety’. Hybrid documentaries eschew didactic and ‘objective’ stylistic features such as the ‘voice of God’, unless used ironically, preferring instead to foreground the voice and perspective of the subject, who may also act as a performer. These documentaries are frequently informed by the personal experience of the director. Through their self-conscious use of stylisation, they exemplify Sontag’s definition of ‘life as theatre,’ or, in Dovey’s words ‘documentary...as performance.’

This DCA research project outlines a definition of the hybrid documentary, through the production of the 52 minute documentary *Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life*, written, produced and directed by the author and a written thesis, examining hybridity in documentary. The exegesis is structured around an analysis of past experiments in documentary form, an examination of my own short film and video work and the performance and visual design innovations employed in *Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life*.

*Jabe Babe – A Heightened Life* has achieved a high level of recognition in critical, broadcast industry and festival contexts, as well as contributing to international academic debate around hybrid documentary forms. The film has also been well received by a wide range of audiences. I conclude that hybrid documentary, an eclectic, subjective and formally inventive genre, is well positioned to adapt to new interactive and web-based delivery platforms in the future, whilst retaining an influential position in the broadcast, cable, festival and theatrical media landscape.